

Report

Channel Islands National Park

■ 1.0 Site Description

Comprised of five of the eight California Channel Islands, Channel Islands National Park is home to a wide variety of natural and cultural resources. Over 2,000 species of plants and animals can be found within the Park. The Park consists of 249,353 acres, half of which are below sea level, including the islands of San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa, and Santa Barbara. The islands within the Park extend along the southern California coast from Point Conception near Santa Barbara to just north of Los Angeles (see Figure 1). The main access points to the Park are Santa Barbara and Ventura along the California coast. The major access route for visitors is from Highway 101. The islands are not readily accessible except by boat or plane. Harbor facilities and a 200 to 300 vehicle parking lot are located in both Santa Barbara and Ventura to transport visitors to and from the islands by boat. Parking capacity is constrained at the Santa Barbara parking lot during the peak season.

Figure 1. Location of Channel Islands National Park



The Park Headquarters and the Robert J. Lagomarsino Visitor Center are located in Ventura (see Figure 2). Free parking is available at the beach parking lot. The Visitor Center on the mainland features a museum, living tidepool exhibit, three-dimensional models of the Park islands, an interactive touch-screen exhibit, a tower with telescopes for viewing the islands, a picnic area, a bookstore, and an outdoor native plant garden. A 25-minute Park movie called “A Treasure in the Sea” runs throughout the day in the auditorium.

Figure 2. The Bechers Bay Pier at Santa Rosa Island (Left) and the Robert J. Lagomarsino Visitor Center (Right)



Visitors to the Park can engage in a variety of recreational opportunities, such as scuba diving, snorkeling, swimming, bird watching, kayaking, and whale watching, and sailing. On the islands, visitors can camp, hike, picnic, and explore tide pools, isolated beaches, and rugged canyons.

Annual visitation to the Park’s mainland Visitor Center is 300,000. Visitation to the islands is lower with about 30,000 visitors traveling to the islands and another 60,000 accessing Park waters. Although the peak season is the summer and fall, migrating gray whales and spectacular wildflower displays attract visitors in the winter and spring. The majority of visitors to the Channel Islands stay for a day trip or camp overnight. According to the Park superintendent, future visitation is expected to grow steadily as more people “discover” the Channel Islands.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

Three private operators run boat and air service out of Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Camarillo. Two operate boat services from Santa Barbara and Ventura while the third provides air tours from the Camarillo airport. A description of these services follows:

- **Island Packers** is the Park’s main operator for boat travel staged from Ventura and Channel Islands Harbors with access provided to all of the islands. A variety of trips, from half-day to multi-day, are offered. Trips range from a three and one-half-hour non-landing tour to Anacapa Island to an all day trip to Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, or Santa Barbara Islands. The boat service uses 100-passenger boats.
- **Truth Aquatics** is the Park’s operator for boat travel staged from Santa Barbara Harbor with access provided to all of the islands. A variety of trips, from one to multi-day, are offered. The service is provided on 50 to 60 passenger boats.

- **Channel Islands Aviation**, located at the Camarillo airport, is the Park’s operator for air travel to Santa Rosa Island. Trips vary from one-day to multi-day camping excursions. From Camarillo Airport, a daily trip departs at 9:30 a.m. and returns at 4:00 p.m. Adult fares are \$98, and children fares (two to 12 years old) are \$78.

Ventura is serviced by Amtrak, Greyhound, and airport shuttle services from the Santa Barbara and Los Angeles International Airports. All boat services operate one round trip per day during the peak season and only during the weekends during the winter months. Fares range from \$15 for children to as high as \$90 for adult day trips. Multi-day trips for San Miguel and Santa Rosa cost \$225. According to the Park superintendent, the boat services are “barely profitable.”

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Since the private operators already provide water and air transportation access to the islands, there is no short-term need for Alternative Transportation systems (ATS) implementation. In addition, current demand and profitability does not justify an increase in service frequency from one round trip per day. However, there may be a long-term need to improve services in the form of a public subsidy. According to the Park superintendent, implementation of a public subsidy could be used to improve boat operations, as well as to expand the charter aircraft services to other remote islands within the Park. Funding is needed to upgrade pier facilities and landing strips for the boat operation. There may also be a need to increase parking facilities at the Santa Barbara pier during congested periods of the summer months.

■ 4.0 Basis for ATS Needs

There is no basis for short-term ATS needs. However, some form of public subsidy for boat facilities and service improvement may be needed in the long-term to ensure adequate transportation access to the islands. As visitation increases, there may be a need to inject some capital resources to making the five islands and other locations more accessible to visitors. Furthermore, some outside funding source(s) may need to be explored to prevent marginally profitable transportation services from disappearing.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Channel Islands National Park. *General Management Plan and Environmental Review*. Channel Islands National Park, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1985.

Channel Islands National Park Web site (<http://www.nps.gov/chis/>).

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Tim Setnika, Superintendent, Channel Islands National Park